

Selfridge Field,
Building #559 (Control Tower)
South of East Joy Blvd. east of North-South Runway
~~Harrison Township~~, Mt. Clemens Vicinity
Macomb County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-116-BB

HAER
MICH
50-MTCLE.V,
1BB-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
GREAT LAKES SYSTEMS OFFICE
1709 JACKSON STREET
OMAHA, NEBRASKA 68102-2571

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

SELFRIDGE FIELD,
BUILDING #559, (CONTROL TOWER)

HAER No. MI-116-BB

Location:

East of North-South runway, south of Taxiway H

Selfridge Air National Guard Base

Mt. Clemens Vic., Macomb Co., MI

U.S.G.S. Mount Clemens East Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 17.349700.4718630

Significance:

The construction of Building #559 was required to facilitate Selfridge's rapidly developing Cold War mission, as a key communications node for Air Defense Command (ADC) and Strategic Air Command (SAC) operations.

Description:

Building #559, the Control Tower, is a square plan, 18 feet 6 inch by 18 foot 6 inch six story steel framed and concrete block structure capped by a hexagonal glass-enclosed observation deck surmounted by platform pipe railing and antennae. The structural integrity is reinforced by concrete vaults. Single story shed roof extensions shielded by rolled roofing occur on its north and south elevations. The primary (north) elevation contains a steel pedestrian entry door that is shielded by a shed roof open porch supported by steel pillars. Single window voids occur on the second through fourth stories and two narrow window voids occur on the fourth story, while an external steel ladder and safety tube link the fifth story platform to the surface. The east elevation is pierced by a sliding track window on the third floor and vented louver on the fourth story. The south elevation ground level is defined by a shed roofed masonry unit with central steel pedestrian access door flanked by a steel louvered vent. Single window voids occur on stories two through four with flanking vents on the third and fourth floors. The west elevation displays a single window void on the third story and a steel pedestrian door and platform on the fourth story.

The interior space provided by each floor is rather confined with the stairway occupying northern portions of each floor. All floors have been renovated and display drop ceilings, wall papered and/or paneled walls and carpeted floors. Each floor maintains a small maintenance closet opposite the stair landing. The ground floor is occupied by a furnace room, consisting of a bare concrete floor supporting a Weil-McLain Furnace. The second story is occupied by the Training Room that also serves as a lounge/locker room area, featuring a carpeted floor and burlap wallpaper above

panelboard wainscoting. The third story contains the Tower Chief's Office, with a carpeted floor, paneling and drop ceiling. The fourth story is a spartan furnace and electrical support equipment room, while the fifth story is also functional, comprised of an equipment room that contains a communications console (OJ314) and recording machinery (GSH59) and a small bathroom. The sixth story is a glass-enclosed control and observation platform occupied by the air controllers consoles, desks and work area. The current technical equipment replaced the original tower apparatus and dates to the mid-1980s.

History:

This building was built in 1956 from designs provided by Clair W. Ditchy, Architect of Royal Oak, Michigan, and was modified in 1958 under the direction of Germany S. Klees, Consulting Engineers of Detroit, for the Air Force Air Defense Command.¹

This structure was built as the base Air Communications Tower to replace the World War II-era tower (original Building #150), which had been located near the site of present Building #154², as Selfridge developed its Cold War training and defense capabilities. (The World War II tower had replaced the 1930s-era control tower on top of Building #50.)

It experienced modification and upgrading in 1967³ and in the 1980s the communications control equipment was modernized. It continues to serve the base as its primary air traffic control facility today.

Sources:

Anonymous, Brief History of Selfridge Air Force Base, 1917-1960, unpublished ms., Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 1960.

¹ Original construction plans on file, Selfridge Base museum and Base Civil Engineers Office

² Interview, Colonel Robert Stone (ret.), Curator Selfridge Base Museum, October 13, 1995; Base Master Plan map, original on file Base Museum

³Original plans on file, Selfridge Base Museum and Base Civil Engineers Office

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Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, unpublished ms., Public Information Office, Selfridge ANG Base, Michigan, 1977.

Copy of construction drawing, dated April 12, 1958, Germany S. Klees, Consulting Engineers, Detroit, in possession of Selfridge Base Museum, Mt. Clemens, Michigan. Modification to Building No. 559, Architectural Elevations and Details.

Copy of construction drawing, dated December 13, 1967, Department of the Air Force, Air Defense Command, Civil Engineering, Selfridge, in possession of Selfridge Base Museum, Mt. Clemens, Michigan. GEEIA Console Support Control Tower Building 559, Sections, Elevations.

Historian:

William E. Rutter
Midwest Environmental Consultants, Inc.
May, 1996